

## 7 April 2005 Press Conference Transcript

**See Opening and Closing statements attached (BG Wade).**

**Driton Ramandi of Radio Ferizaj:** *In regards to the smuggling issue, which is the most noticeable aspect of this issue?*

**BG William H. Wade II:** It's hard to narrow down smuggling to just one type. The smuggling of weapons, illegal goods and other types of contraband threaten a vibrant and prosperous society. Every part of smuggling threatens the basis of a safe and secure society. Obviously, the smuggling of illegal goods threatens the development of an economic base for Kosovo. The smuggling of weapons threatens the safety of everybody in this region. The best demonstration of a mature and free society is for every citizen to speak out against and take action against any smuggling activities.

**Njazi Ejupi from Zeri:** *The Kosovo press has received a lot of attention to the issue of organized crime and the people who have been pointed out as to blame are a class of high officials in Kosovo. What is your comment on that?*

**BG Wade:** In any civilized society of the world, to develop a free and democratic way of life, nobody can be above the law. It is incumbent upon the system, every person, every citizen within that societal system, to speak out against and take action against any person that is suspected of an illegal act. In a free and mature democratic society, that includes even elected public officials. That is why it is so important that the Kosovo Police Service and the court system, the legal system in the provisional government, takes action when those things are made known.

**Abdellah Chankou of Aujord'hui le Maroc (Morocco):** *Have you already investigated some of these smugglers and how much of an effect does it have on the Kosovo economy.*

**BG Wade:** First, KFOR does not get actively involved in arrests. We turn people over to KPS, KPS actually does the arresting. Any illegal smuggling effect has a negative and debilitating effect on trying to develop a robust and viable economy. In order to ensure that a long-lasting economy is developed in this region, people should do everything they can to avoid the purchase of smuggled goods. It only chips away at the foundation of a good economy.

**Musli Berisha of Radio Tema and Kosova Live:** *In your speech you mentioned your concern regarding some reports of freedom of movement or lack of freedom of movement. Could you give us more information or details in regard to these reports? Who and how do they prevent freedom of movement? Or hamper?*

**BG Wade:** In my short time here, I have not seen, personally, direct evidence with problems of freedom of movement. What I know comes from reports of various people to local authorities, either the municipality or to KPS. Working closely with local authorities, KFOR takes seriously and investigates every one of these claims. Some of these complaints are not due to actual threats, but just a perceived feeling of insecurity based on things that have happened before. As long as this perception continues, we must

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all work together to ensure that everybody, whatever ethnic background, can work, shop, go to school and seek medical care, without fear of harm.

I would like to add that it's important to note that in any society, you have people who will behave badly. It is important to make sure that we understand, truly ethnic problems, as opposed to people who are just behaving badly, irrespective of ethnic background.

**Demush Zefaj of Bota Sot:** *Before, it was thought our trouble occurred during the March month, something like this was also stated by KFOR, but at the same time nothing happened, no trouble happened. The question is what was KFOR's role to, I guess, change the mind of the people who did think so, because March has gone and no riots or trouble happened. There is more security. What is your comment?*

**BG Wade:** Well clearly, KFOR, as well as the civilian government, prepared to handle any civil unrest that might occur. However, it's important to give credit, where credit is due, and I think that credit goes to the current civil government, KPS, and the maturity of all the people of Kosovo. I believe that the government and the people saw that a reoccurrence of last March would only cause their further development to stall. This mature attitude that the government and the people demonstrated, was a clear sign of a maturing society that wants to move forward in a positive direction. I commend the government and the people for such a positive and mature job of controlling things.

**Rexhap Suma of Kosova Sot:** *In regards to the contraband, smuggling issue, you mentioned you have and you will take aggressive action to help the local authorities for them to be able to deal with this issue. What actual action were you referring to and what kind of experience do you offer to the local authorities?*

**BG Wade:** With the onset of warmer and drier weather, it is much easier for smugglers to come across the Administrative Boundary Line or the borders with their smuggled goods. In order to stop that increased activity, we have increased the number of border patrols that we have along the border and the Administrative Boundary Line. We've also increased the frequency of those patrols. We have more of them out for a longer period of time. But once again, I want to highlight the importance of the KPS and the people of Kosovo making it possible for us to do that. By everybody behaving better, it allows KFOR to put more forces against smuggling and extremist activity.

Also, I would add, that a lot of people have noticed that there are more Soldiers here than normal. They are brought here as a normal training rotation, to ensure that we develop inter-operability mechanisms. Whenever those soldiers are brought here by their country, I always ask COMKFOR to let me use them in our fight against smuggling and extremist activity along the border and ABL. That is one of the biggest things that I can do for this region to ensure a safe and secure environment.

**Skender Idrizi of TV Festina:** *I think to prevent smuggling we also need the cooperation of the other counties that border Kosovo. Do you have any contacts with them and what is the current situation in regard?*

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**BG Wade:** Thank you, that's an excellent question. Yes, and we have opened dialogue with both Serbia, as well as FYROM and are currently working a tri-lateral agreement just for that purpose of protecting the border and the Administrative Boundary Line. In fact, this afternoon in about two hours, I will receive a briefing from my staff on the status of that agreement.

I would like to back to this gentleman here (*Rexhap Suma*) because I failed to answer part of his question. I believe part of your question was what do we bring to the anti-smuggling fight. As I said in the last press conference when I was here with General Carmony, this rotation of National Guard personnel comes from 27 different states in America. Two key states are California and New Mexico. Both of those states have a very robust counter-drug operation along the Mexican border. Many of those Soldiers on this rotation work in that program in the United States. So they bring many years of experience dealing with smugglers and how they interdict those smuggling operations.

I can take one more question, or you all have to listen to me sing.

Very wise people.

**Unknown Reporter:** *He said that smuggling hinders the economic development of the region. What are the other resources?*

**BG Wade:** As in any society, when you have illegal operations, they take away from the administration of the regular government. Whenever you have to take away from the assets from the government, from the police service, from customs, to fight illegal smuggling, then they're not doing the other business of government that benefits the entire society. More importantly, smuggled goods do not come into the country through normal channels, where there are imports that they can be taxed if the government so decides and that they feed the economy. Smuggling drains the development of any economy.

**Vllaznim Jakupi of TV Liria:** *We see a more diverse members of the journalists today, that come from other countries. Normally this is very good for us, and my question is today a special day, or will this interest keep going in the future?*

**BG Wade:** That's a good question. Maybe the Public Affairs officer can answer why is it that they're here on this day. But, I think the important thing is that these are from NATO Mediterranean dialogue countries and we are on a NATO mission. I think that's important for the future of this region, that the NATIO Mediterranean countries are interested in what's happening here. KFOR is here because of the United Nations, NATO and an international mandate. I think the fact that other NATO countries are looking at, and interested in what's happening in Kosovo, is a positive sign that things to move forward.

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